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U.S. Abandons Idea of Bigger U.N. Role in Iraq Occupation

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 13 — The Bush administration has abandoned the idea of giving the United Nations more of a role in the occupation of Iraq as sought by France, India and other countries as a condition for their participation in peacekeeping there, administration officials said today.

Instead, the officials said, the United States would widen its effort to enlist other countries to assist the occupation forces in Iraq, which are dominated by the 139,000 United States troops there.

In addition to American forces in Iraq, there are 21,000 troops representing 18 countries. At present, 11,000 of that number are from Britain. The United States plans to seek larger numbers to help, especially with relief supplies that are coming from another dozen countries.

Administration officials said that in spite of the difficult security situation in Iraq, there was a consensus in the administration that it would be better to work with these countries than to involve the United Nations or countries that opposed the war and are now eager to exercise influence in a postwar Iraq.

"The administration is not willing to confront going to the Security Council and saying, 'We really need to make Iraq an international operation,' " said an administration official. "You can make a case that it would be better to do that, but right now the situation in Iraq is not that dire."

The administration's position could complicate its hopes of bringing a large number of American troops home in short order. The length of the American occupation depends on how quickly the country can be stabilized and the attacks and uprisings brought under control.

The thinking on broadening international forces was disclosed today as the United States moved on a separate front at the Security Council to get a resolution passed this week that would welcome the establishment of the 25-member Governing Council set up by the United States and Britain in Iraq.

Security Council diplomats said today that they expected the resolution to pass, but not without some qualms among some members.

In a measure of these misgivings, the diplomats said the wording of the resolution was changed at the last minute this morning from saying that the Security Council "endorses" the Iraqi group to saying that the Council "welcomes" it.

The resolution would also establish an "assistance mission" of the United Nations in Baghdad to support various United Nations activities there. Both steps were sought by the United Nations secretary general, Kofi Annan, who had been under some pressure from Washington to make a gesture to recognize the legitimacy of the occupation.

The American-led occupation picked the Governing Council members in July, appointing people who represented a mix of ethnic and sectarian interests to oversee Iraqi ministries and begin the process of drafting an Iraqi constitution.

Several Governing Council members have visited the United Nations, and earlier this month Mr. Annan said he favored "some form of recognition" for the Governing Council through a Security Council resolution.

The resolution drafted by the United States and submitted today was perfunctory compared with previous Council resolutions on Iraq.

Administration officials said they expected to win the approval of the Council, although it was possible that Syria would abstain or vote against the resolution. Only a negative vote from the five permanent members of the Council — Russia, China, France, Britain and the United States — would constitute a veto.

Though the administration has decided against seeking a separate resolution to give the United Nations any authority over security, some officials say that consideration might be given to getting wider United Nations authority over the multibillion-dollar reconstruction of Iraq.

A meeting of potential donor countries has been scheduled for Oct. 24 in Madrid, and some of the big European countries that wanted a more significant United Nations role if they sent peacekeepers are also hinting that they wanted the United Nations to have more of a say over reconstruction if they have to put up huge sums of money for that effort.

In Iraq this week, L. Paul Bremer III, the top American administrator in the occupation, said that over the next four years, the amount of money needed from outside for Iraq would be "staggering." Many experts say it could amount to tens of billions of dollars.

The Bush administration has been reluctant to give the United Nations more than minimal authority in the reconstruction of Iraq. Many administration members say that France, Germany, Russia and other countries demanding such a role are actually doing so to try to get more contracts and economic benefits for themselves.

The desire for more United Nations involvement by many countries echoes the debate that preceded the war. Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and others were openly disdainful of getting United Nations authorization for the war, even after Mr. Bush had sided with Secretary of State Colin L. Powell to pursue that route.

Mr. Rumsfeld, according to administration officials, vehemently opposes any dilution of military authority over Iraq by involving the United Nations, either through United Nations peacekeepers or indirectly in any United Nations authorization of forces from other countries.

American military officials say they fear that involving the United Nations, even indirectly, will hamper the latitude the United States must have in overseeing Iraqi security and pursuing anti-American guerrilla forces or terrorist actions.

The Pentagon said today that besides the United States and Britain, the other countries that have already sent troops to Iraq are Albania, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Ukraine. The

troops in Iraq serve under American and British command, and so would the troops of any other countries that took part.

In addition, another dozen countries have been asked to help with forces to protect and carry out relief. They include Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Mongolia, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Portugal and Thailand.

In all, a Pentagon official said, the United States hopes to round up 44 countries to participate in the occupation.

A setback in the drive to line up countries occurred in July, when India, in a reversal, said it would not participate without further United Nations authority over peacekeeping. France, Germany and some other countries agreed.

Some administration officials said they would now rethink their strategy of spurning the United Nations and see if there could be some language worked out in a Security Council resolution as sought by India and the other countries.

In effect, administration officials now say, such a resolution would be more trouble than it is worth. Soundings among members of the Security Council indicated that Russia, France and other countries might try for concessions favorable to them in the running of Iraq, and such demands would only deepen divisions between them and the United States.

"The last thing we need is a loss of momentum over the efforts to get things under control in Iraq," said a Western diplomat involved in these discussions. "Besides, the violence in Iraq is not as bad as everyone thinks it is."

Some experts say that sooner or later the United States may have to change its mind again, particularly if conditions in Iraq deteriorate drastically. United Nations officials involved in peacekeeping efforts in Afghanistan and the Balkans say that the total number of troops in Iraq may have to double before the security situation comes under control.